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ABSTRACT

Currently at least 5 million children--some estimates are as high as 15 million--are left unsupervised before or after school for 3 or more hours a day. In response to the problems of these latchkey children, many public schools are now developing some form of school-based or school-related before- and after-school child care programs. The purpose of this fastback is to examine: (1) organizational criteria and structures of school-age child care programs; and (2) key issues that school personnel must address in order to develop an effective child care program affiliated with or administered by a public school. Following an introduction, the fastback's contents cover: (1) the effective child care program; (2) regulations and licensing; (3) types of child care programs (programs by age of children served, programs by type of sponsorship); (4) a typical school-age child care program (mission statement/major goals, program size and scope, calendar and hours of operation, staffing, staff qualifications and training, communication and public relations issues, curriculum and activities, financial matters); (5) miscellaneous issues (e.g., special needs, summer programs); and (6) resources. (Contains 13 resources.) (EV)

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# FASTBACK

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# School-Age Child Care

James R. LeBuffe
Sherran A. Hargreaves

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**James R. LeBuffe**

**Sherran A. Hargreaves**

James R. LeBuffe currently is an assistant superintendent for secondary schools in the Conroe Independent School District in Texas. He has been a teacher, principal, and central office administrator. LeBuffe received his M.A. in deaf education from Gallaudet University and his doctorate in educational administration from Temple University.

LeBuffe has published widely on the profession. He also is the author of fastback 376 *Hands-On Science in the Elementary School*. Recently LeBuffe published a book about baseball hitters.

Sherran A. Hargreaves is the program coordinator for the Extended Day Program in the Fort Bend Independent School District in Sugar Land, Texas. She has established the procedures and policies for the program since it began in 1993.

Before her current position, Hargreaves taught in elementary schools for 17 years. She was a candidate for teacher of the year for a Title I school in 1988 and for a multicultural school in 1992. She is a member of the Texas Association for School Age Care and the National School-Age Care Alliance.

Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

# School-Age Child Care

by
James R. LeBuffe
and
Sherran A. Hargreaves

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# Introduction

The term "latchkey" children was coined during World War II to describe children who were regularly left without direct adult supervision either before or after school. With no parents at home, they had to carry their own latchkey. Nowadays perhaps 30% of American elementary-age students leave for school, come home from school, or both, without direct adult supervision (Lilly 1992). With more than 28 million school-age children whose single parent or both parents work outside the home, that means at least 5 million — some estimates are as high as 15 million — are left unsupervised for three or more hours each day. And it appears that more and more formerly stay-at-home parents will be entering the workforce in the future (U.S. Department of Education 1998).

In 1993-94, before- and after-school child care was offered in 30% of the public schools and 50% of the private schools, having increased from 15% and 33%, respectively, in 1987-88 (National Center for Education Statistics 1997). However, according to the U.S. General Accounting Office (1998), current school-age childcare programs in urban areas likely will be able to meet no

more than 25% of the need for such care by the year 2002.

Contrary to popular image, latchkey children do not come mainly from poor, minority, or single-parent homes, though many do. Changing work patterns at all socioeconomic levels have contributed significantly to the growing population of latchkey children.

Experts agree that school-age children who are unsupervised during after-school hours are far more likely to use alcohol, drugs, and tobacco; to commit crimes; to earn poor grades; and to drop out of school than are those students who are involved in supervised, constructive activities. According to statistical records, most juvenile crime takes place between the hours of two o'clock in the afternoon and eight o'clock in the evening. Moreover, children themselves are more likely to be victims of crime during the hours after school (Riley 1994).

According to a poll of 800 voters nationwide that was released in 1998 and funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Americans strongly endorse the creation of safe, affordable, after-school, enrichment programs. Ninety-three percent of the respondents say they favor making daily programs available to all children. Eighty percent of those polled were even willing to pay higher taxes to provide after-school opportunities. Voters viewed a lack of parental involvement and lack of discipline in children as the biggest problems facing young people. High-quality after-school programs were seen as at least part of the solution to both problems.

In response to the problems of latchkey children, many public schools are now developing some form of

school-based or school-related before- and after-school childcare program. Research indicates that high-quality after-school programs enhance the self-esteem and the social and academic competence of the children in them. Following are some of the other positive effects attributed to school-age childcare programs (Riley 1994):

- Children are more cooperative with adults.
- Children learn to handle conflicts by talking or negotiating, instead of hitting or fighting.
- Vandalism in the school decreases.
- Children get better grades.
- Children avoid being retained in grade.

The purpose of this fastback is to examine 1) organizational criteria and structures of such programs and 2) key issues that school personnel must address in order to develop an effective childcare program to be affiliated with or administered by a public school.

# The Effective Childcare Program

Just as educators can define the elements of an effective classroom, so, too, are there markers for effective before- and after-school child care. A high-quality childcare program will embody the following characteristics (NAESP 1993):

*Adequate Space.* The capacity of the childcare area as determined by building codes and fire codes may limit or influence the size of the program. The program should have a clearly stated, written, enforced maximum number of children it can serve; after this limit is reached, children should be denied entrance and placed on a waiting list until an opening occurs.

Programs operated in schools often have an advantage over private programs because schools have access to other rooms, such as gymnasiums, libraries, and computer rooms, which can significantly increase the capacity of the program. At minimum, the program will require a cozy and well-organized indoor space with a variety of interest areas, or centers, for the children. An outdoor play area adjoining the childcare facility is highly recommended.

*Attention to Safety and Security.* The building and play area should be safe and secure for children, staff, and parents coming to drop off and pick up students. Comprehensive, written procedures should be in place and should be strictly adhered to concerning who may drop off and pick up children and when. Two-way radios or intercoms can make it easier to send for and keep track of children.

*Clean Facilities.* Childcare programs should be established in facilities that are cleaned regularly. Childcare workers also should attend to cleaning materials used in the program, such as washing dolls and other toys regularly.

*Healthy Snacks.* A wholesome snack should be available to children in an after-school program. Childcare workers should wear gloves when serving snacks and should wipe eating areas with an antibacterial soap daily.

*Reasonable Cost.* The cost of the program should be reasonable for the families it will serve. Fees should be comparable to other childcare programs in the area. Many schools can tap local sources for funds to supplement fees, particularly for families in poverty.

*Effective Communication with School Officials.* Many school-affiliated programs are quasi-independent. Therefore effective communication between school officials and program supervisors and workers is essential. Such communication reduces time and space conflicts that can arise from sharing facilities and ensures that

educators' and childcare workers' goals are complementary.

*Effective Communication with Parents.* The program should have written procedures that are provided to parents. Effective communication also is fostered through memos sent home and informative bulletin boards in the program area. The childcare program often can make good use of voice mail and e-mail. Many programs also involve parents through a parent advisory group that meets periodically to discuss concerns and program activities.

Inviting parents occasionally to take part in the program can be helpful. Parents might attend a talent show, visit the program to read to students, or provide tutorial assistance as students work on homework.

*Accreditation.* While public school-sponsored childcare programs usually are not required to attain certification as childcare centers, certain elements of the certification process can prove to be useful for schools. The National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) has developed a thorough list of quality characteristics that are used to certify childcare centers. The list includes practice standards in such areas as human relations, indoor environment, outdoor environment, activities, safety, health and nutrition, and administration. The standards are available from NSACA by electronic mail at *staff@nsaca.org*. Their address is National School-Age Care Alliance, 1137 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02124; and they can be found online at *http://www.nsaca.org*.

*Appropriate Staff Credentials.* The childcare program director should be an education professional with experience as a teacher. Childcare workers should be high school graduates, preferably with at least a year of college work or currently attending college. Experience in childcare is particularly helpful but not essential, because all employees should complete a professional development program that includes information on child development, appropriate discipline, design and implementation of learning-play activities, and safety procedures. Most authorities recommend that police background checks be done on all potential employees.

*Professional Development.* The topics above suggest many of the areas in which professional development is needed. The following organizations can provide guidelines for staff development: The National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and Wellesley University. Wellesley University has just completed the National Standards and Accreditation System and a Credential's Program for School-Age Child Care. In addition, local organizations, such as the Red Cross, can provide training in CPR and first aid.

*Low Staff Turnover.* Effective childcare programs usually are marked by low staff turnover. High turnover rates often indicate problems that are not being addressed adequately. The same may be said of student turnover.

*Appropriate Adult-Child Ratio.* Childcare programs for elementary-age students operate most successfully

with 15 or fewer children per adult worker. However, the requirements for licensing childcare programs vary from state to state.

*Written Policies and Plans.* Written policies that are provided to parents have already been mentioned. These policies should address admission procedures, behavior standards, fees, pick-up and drop-off procedures, activities, snacks, and the like. (More details about the contents of written policies will be provided later in this fastback.)

Written plans also mark the well-run childcare program. Thoughtfully chosen activities and choices for students regarding what they can do are essential to smooth operation of the program. While the childcare program does not need to be specifically educational, it should support the general goals and objectives of the school. Written plans might focus on three types of activity:

- Interest centers, where students can explore or pursue various interests. These centers should offer a range of activities for students at all developmental stages.
- Activity choices, meaning that some students can choose quiet activities, such as reading or studying. Others may choose more active pursuits, such as playing outdoors in free play or organized sports, using a computer lab, creating artwork, working in a nature center, and so on.
- Homework support, especially for students in grade 3 and higher. Peer assistance and parental tutoring are two possible ways to provide support, in

addition to help and supervision offered by child-care workers.

*Code of Ethics.* Some programs develop a code of ethics. Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota, has developed a proposed code that includes statements about the values of the profession and ethical responsibilities to children and youth, to families, to colleagues, to communities, and to society. A copy of this proposed code may be obtained from Concordia University, School-Age Care, Department of Human Services, 275 Syndicate Street South, St. Paul, MN 55104.

*A Positive Environment.* The tone of the childcare program is important. Staff should exhibit personal warmth and real enjoyment of and respect for students. Students should like being in the program and look forward to attending regularly.

# Regulations and Licensing

Providers of school-age child care will want to investigate applicable regulations involving licensing, building codes, fire codes, zoning, and a range of other compliance issues. In order to obtain liability insurance, childcare providers usually must be able to demonstrate compliance with all applicable regulations. The type of program and its relationship with a sponsoring entity (such as a school) also will affect licensing and liability.

Nonschool-sponsored childcare programs that operate in school facilities or other public locations usually fall under the jurisdiction of the same state agency that regulates commercial and nonprofit childcare programs. School-sponsored programs, depending on the state or local area, may be regulated by childcare agencies, state boards of education, or local school boards. Some research will be necessary to establish jurisdictional matters and to obtain information about the regulations to be followed in developing a childcare program.

Limited childcare programs — such as drop-in programs, special programs offered from time to time,

childcare offered as part of a child development laboratory, summer camps, programs operated by religious groups, and programs that operate less than a given minimum number of hours per week — are exempt from most regulations in many states.

Where licensing requirements exist, they usually have developed from rules that were originally made to regulate preschool programs. Thus they tend to focus on ratios — children per square foot of space, children per teacher — and required equipment. There is still considerable confusion with regard to jurisdictional issues and regulation; therefore, school officials desiring to initiate a before- or after-school childcare program would be well-advised to seek legal counsel prior to proceeding (Seligson and Allenson 1993).

Schools are best able to operate quality childcare programs, or to play a supportive role in their operation, when the school board has established policies about: 1) the use of and access to space on school property, 2) extent of accountability and limits of responsibility of all parties concerning the program, 3) school and program liability in case of accident or injury to a child or a staff member, and 4) the school's role with regard to program licensing.

# Types of Childcare Programs

School-age childcare programs can be divided according to the ages of the children to be served and the program's type of sponsorship.

## Programs by Age of Children Served

There are many options for school-age child care. No single program is likely to meet the needs of all children. Some children may benefit from a slower pace and smaller environment, such as might be provided by family daycare services or individual caregivers. Other children may enjoy the larger physical and social setting of an after-school program that focuses on themes, clubs, leagues, or intramural sports. Children with special talents may enjoy a narrowly focused program that allows them to improve specific skills.

An adjunct to providing child care is to provide support services for latchkey children and their parents. Such services include educational materials, telephone resource lines staffed by trained personnel, and block-parent programs that provide training for neighbor-

hood volunteers who make their homes available as "safe places" for emergencies that latchkey children may experience.

*Infant and Preschool Programs.* Most school-based programs do not attempt to serve children under age four. Laws regarding child care for these youngest children often are stringent, and the children are younger than most public school personnel are prepared to serve.

Many public schools do address the needs of four- and five-year-old preschoolers, particularly children with disabilities and those for whom English is not their first language. But the schools do so within the context of the regular school day, rather than offer extended-day programs.

*Kindergarten Programs.* If a school provides an all-day kindergarten program, children in this age group may be included in any before- or after-school care program. Special allowance often is made for these young children, knowing that they likely will be tired after a long school day.

Many schools offer only a half day of kindergarten instruction. Extended-day programs in these situations combine before- or after-school child care with care for the nonschool portion of the day. Often the greatest challenge to operating this type of program is finding suitable space. Kindergarten classrooms usually are used for instruction during both morning and afternoon. The same is true for other facilities, such as multipurpose rooms, cafeterias, gymnasiums, and so forth.

*Elementary School Programs.* Before- and after-school childcare programs are most common for elementary-age youngsters. Such programs vary from location to location, but the basics are the same wherever they exist. In the next section of this fastback, we will describe in some detail a typical elementary program.

*Middle School Programs.* "Middle school" can include various grade combinations, sometimes beginning as early as fifth grade and extending to eighth or ninth grade. The larger facilities and staffs of typical middle schools offer somewhat greater flexibility in structuring before- and after-school care.

However, extended-day programs at this level are fairly rare for a number of reasons. Often students in this age group are not interested in coming to school early or staying late and have developed sufficient responsibility to be allowed to become latchkey children. In many cases students are occupied, particularly after school, with school-sponsored activities, such as clubs or sports, or with activities sponsored by community groups, such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters or Boys' and Girls' Clubs.

The impetus for considering extended-day programs for this age group comes from a recognition of problems, or the potential for problems, such as teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, or criminal activity, such as shoplifting and vandalism.

Middle school childcare programs usually take one of two forms. The "intramural model" offers students choices of activities ranging from sports (such as basket-

ball, softball, volleyball, table tennis, and soccer) to board games and arts and crafts. The "club model" focuses less on sports and more on academic tie-in activities. Students participate in one or more clubs: drama, speech, math, chess, arts and crafts, anti-drug, choir, and so on. The clubs usually elect officers, set rules of order, and develop club projects that may be forms of community service.

## Programs by Type of Sponsorship

Another way to look at before- and after-school childcare programs is by who sponsors the program.

*For-Profit Sponsors.* Many for-profit companies across the United States provide before- and after-school child care. These companies usually care for a range of ages. They normally operate from their own facilities and often maintain one or more buses, so that they can take children to school, pick them up after dismissal, or both.

*Federal, State, or City Sponsors.* Among federal programs, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is a key component of the White House effort to keep children safe and to help them learn after school. Congress has supported this initiative by appropriating $200 million for it in 1999. This $200 million will fund approximately 1,600 Community Learning Centers in 500 to 600 communities to establish or expand school-based after-school programs throughout the United States.

Of longer standing is Head Start, a large, federally funded childcare program serving mainly three-, four-,

and five-year-old children that has been in existence since the mid-1960s. Head Start served almost 800,000 children in 1997 and received almost $4 billion in federal funding. The program targets mainly low-income families. Sixty-one percent of families receiving Head Start services had incomes of less than $9,000 per year and 78% had yearly incomes below $12,000, according to the Head Start Fact Sheet, available online at *http://act.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/facts98.htm*.

Several states provide grants for school districts to set up childcare programs. For example, Missouri awards grants to districts for up to $40,000 through their Elementary and Secondary Education Departments. In Kentucky the Education Reform Act mandates the creation of a Family Resource Center (FRC) in each elementary school where 20% or more of the children qualify for free or reduced lunch. Each Family Resource Center is to coordinate school-age child care in the local community if such care is otherwise unavailable (Seligson and Allenson 1993).

As a city example, in Texas the Houston Area Network for Dependent Services (HANDS) is a coalition of approximately 30 area companies that provides funds to childcare programs that have been nominated by their employees.

*Church Sponsors.* It is not uncommon for churches to sponsor before- or after-school childcare programs for public school students as well as for students attending private or church-related schools. Often, church-sponsored child care is provided at quite reasonable cost to

parents. Most church-sponsored childcare programs are maintained in church facilities, often using underused Sunday School classrooms, for example.

*Private School Sponsors.* Many private schools have traditionally offered child care for their students, frequently highlighting such care as a selling point in attracting students to their schools. Extra tuition usually is charged for students participating in before- or after-school childcare activities.

*Child-Centered Agency Sponsors.* A wide array of community child-centered entities sponsor before- and after-school child care. Such sponsors include YMCAs, YWCAs, Boys' and Girls' Clubs, and city and country recreation departments. Costs for child care vary as widely as the programs.

*Cooperative Sponsors.* Public schools in many localities form cooperative agreements with child-centered agencies in the community. For example, a local YMCA might use school facilities to maintain a before- or after-school childcare program away from its own site. In cooperative sponsorship arrangements, the local agency usually provides the staff and program oversight, while the school provides physical space, equipment, and so on.

A number of considerations enter into the development of such cooperation:

- Facilities: What school facilities are to be in use for the childcare program? Which parts of the campus are on and off limits to the childcare program.

- Rent: Should the community agency pay rent to the school district for facility use? Is there agreement concerning responsibility for damage to facilities or equipment or theft?
- Custodial Services: Who is responsible for custodial services for the childcare area?
- Insurance: What are the liability issues? Who should be insured and against what eventualities?
- Hours of Operation: Will the program offer a before-school option? an after-school option? both? How will program hours jibe with school hours?
- Calendar: Will the program operate on the same days that school is in session? What about on in-service days, or half-days, when teachers are working but students are not in school?
- Quality Assurance: When a childcare program is held on its property, a public school must have assurance that it is of high quality. Who supervises the program? Who evaluates?

There can be several advantages for a public school to join in cooperative sponsorship:

- The district does not have to administer and staff another program.
- A service that is in demand is provided to families.
- Cooperation with another organization in the community is demonstrated.

There also can be some disadvantages:

- The quality of the program may not be up to school district standards.

- The district may receive many complaints and queries about the program, yet not have control over the program.
- Facility and equipment issues — cleanliness, wear and tear, misuse, theft —can become problems.

*School Sponsors.* More and more schools across the United States are operating school-age childcare programs before or after school or both. The advantage to a school (or district) in developing such a program on its own is that it can better control the program in terms of quality, services, costs, and so on. School-sponsored programs also tend to be advantageous for students, because students can stay in familiar surroundings for before- or after-school care. Parents and schools alike also avoid costs and potential problems associated with transporting students to other care facilities.

The section that follows describes a typical school-age childcare program that is school-sponsored.

# A Typical School-Age Childcare Program

Following is a description of a typical school-age childcare program. This program is operated by the Fort Bend Independent School District in Sugar Land, Texas.

Fort Bend ISD is a rapidly growing, ethnically diverse, urban/suburban school district of more than 50,000 students and more than 50 schools, including 33 elementary schools serving students in kindergarten through grade 5. A district-run Extended Day Program has existed since 1993. Some major elements of this program follow.

## Mission Statement/Major Goals

Fort Bend ISD's mission statement reads:

> We are dedicated to providing a safe, secure, and happy environment for latchkey children before and after the school day. Recognizing that all children are unique, we will strive to help them reach their full potential as responsible citizens in our culturally diverse community. As an extension of the school, we will achieve a

successful work and play relationship to build respect for self and others.

The major goals of the program are to:

- Provide a safe, secure, and happy environment.
- Address the educational, social, and physical needs of children.
- Provide the staff with ongoing training and the knowledge of available resources.
- Use school and district resources and personnel to strengthen the program.
- Develop and maintain a close working relationship with the school.
- Actively recruit college students, especially those majoring in education, to be part-time employees in the program.
- Communicate clearly with parents, staff, and school.

## Program Size and Scope

The Fort Bend ISD program operates at all of the district's elementary schools. The student population limit is set at between 75 and 80 students at each site. Waiting lists are in place on some campuses, whereas vacancies exist on others. The program currently serves more than 2,300 students at the 33 elementary campuses.

## Calendar and Hours of Operation

The program offers a before-school session from 6:30 to 7:30 a.m and an after-school session from 2:30 to 6:30

p.m. It operates on all school days, most staff development days, and some days during spring and winter breaks.

## Staffing

The program typically employs, at each site, a site director and three or four childcare workers. Site directors work more than 18.5 hours per week and therefore receive benefits. Childcare workers work to a maximum of 18.5 hours a week and therefore do not receive benefits from the school district, unless these employees pay much of the cost themselves. As of this writing, the site directors are paid $15.75 per hour and childcare workers $10.00 per hour. The 33-site program employs 33 site coordinators and approximately 120 part-time childcare workers.

Seven full-time employees, including a program director, four supervisors, a secretary, and an accounting clerk, administer the program centrally. The program director is paid on a level comparable to district subject area coordinators. Area supervisors, each of whom coordinates and administers programs in eight to 10 schools, are paid at a rate comparable to teachers.

## Staff Qualifications and Training

The school district requires the childcare workers to have a high school diploma and paraprofessional certification.

Ongoing training is provided every two weeks to site coordinators, often using district staff to deliver infor-

mation on topics that include management, discipline, developmentally appropriate activities, and ways to help with academics. The site coordinators then meet with and train their campus staffs in weekly meetings.

Full-time administrative staff and some site coordinators regularly attend state or national conferences of the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA).

All employees take part in two annual, paid, staff-development days, during which such topics as developing age-appropriate activities, maintaining good discipline, writing lesson plans, and following procedures and policies are presented.

## Communication and Public Relations Issues

Positive public relations have helped to create a good image of the program; and most elementary school principals have welcomed the program to their campuses, which has facilitated program success.

A Parent Advisory Board meets several times each year to provide parents with opportunities to suggest ideas for the program. This board also allows the school district to be proactive in addressing parent concerns.

Arrangements have been made with local daycare centers to offer child care on days when the district program is closed. These childcare companies do not charge a registration fee for occasional, drop-in child care provided to children who usually attend the district program. A list of these local childcare providers and their rates is provided to parents as part of the program's communications effort.

Willingness to collaborate with other school district departments also creates many possibilities for these departments to hold programs without having to plan for child care. Also, the childcare program can reinforce school study themes, assist with homework, and encourage reading. School-sponsored child care can facilitate social work and psychological services for students who are troubled or for families in crisis.

## Curriculum and Activities

A typical afternoon in after-school child care includes snack time, a homework period, and planned, age-appropriate activities.

Healthy snacks are provided through the district's Child Nutrition Department, the food-service professionals, which eliminates the need to store food items onsite. The snack service is operated by the district on a charge-back basis to the childcare program.

Childcare lesson plans are written by staff on a weekly basis, often working together during staff meetings. School instructional themes are used to generate ideas. But childcare "instruction" takes a lighter touch than does classroom teaching. Many activities are play-centered. Student activity centers in the childcare setting include a wide range of supplies and equipment: building blocks, play housekeeping toys, art materials, music, puppets, and so on. Math manipulatives and science equipment also can extend classroom opportunities during after-school child care.

The school district childcare program also collaborates with the business community periodically to provide

tennis, folk art, computer, foreign language, and other lessons during childcare time. Tuition usually is charged for these programs.

## Financial Matters

In the main, the district-sponsored childcare program is self-supporting in the same way that food-service programs often are expected to be self-supporting. If, or when, a fund balance accrues, the money is used to improve the program or to assist with other district needs. When outside vendors provide services or programs for young people during before- or after-school care hours, the district can charge such vendors for rental of school facilities, or quid pro quo arrangements can be devised.

Staff for the school-sponsored childcare program are mostly part-time employees, which reduces the benefit portion of the salary bill for the program. Some districts allow teachers to work in the program part-time to supplement their income from teaching.

Lower staff costs, coupled with reduced costs for facilities, allows the childcare program to charge fees below the rate for most commercial childcare centers. The Fort Bend ISD childcare fee for 1998-99, for example, was only $140 per month. The Fort Bend experience validates the worth of a monthly charge (with reduced rates for August and December, when school is not in session for the entire month) compared to prorating on an hourly or daily basis, which can become a bookkeeping nightmare.

Some allowance will need to be made, however, with regard to attendance before school, after school, or at

both times. In some districts, the morning session is provided gratis if the child also attends in the afternoon. Other districts make a separate charge for each time of day that the child attends.

Financial aid can be supplied to assist impoverished families. The Fort Bend ISD experience has been to require at least a $20-per-month family payment, feeling that a full-fee subsidy often leads to abuses, such as spotty attendance. To obtain financial assistance, families are asked to submit a financial aid application, including their most recent federal tax return and two concurrent pay stubs. Applications are reviewed by the program administrator with assistance from a social worker or counselor.

The school district's business office audits the school-sponsored childcare program in the same manner that it audits other district programs.



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# Miscellaneous Issues

Following are additional issues — in no particular order — that can arise when considering or establishing a district-sponsored childcare program.

*Staff Recruitment.* Finding well-qualified part-time staff to work in the childcare program can be difficult for some school districts. College students majoring in education or other areas can be an excellent source of employees, and collaboration in this regard may lead to other productive collaborations between a school district and nearby institutions of higher education.

*Admission.* Some childcare centers will reach capacity quickly because the need for before- or after-school care is great. What procedures should be followed with regard to waiting lists? Is admission prioritized or on a "first come, first served" basis?

*Care for Staff Members' Children.* Some consideration should be given to the matter of caring for children of school district employees. Should the childcare program make special allowances for the children of district employees in the areas of admission, placement, or fees?

*Pick-Up and Drop-Off Procedures.* Safety and security are important. Consideration needs to be given to traffic and how children may be dropped off or picked up safely. Who is allowed to pick up a child is a security issue. Sign-in/sign-out procedures and identity checks are standard. Most programs do not recommend allowing children to be picked up by individuals under age 16. Most programs assess late fees when parents or guardians fail to pick up their children by the posted closing time.

*Dismissal from the Program.* Childcare programs are not mandatory; therefore attendance issues fall outside legal standards. Most programs dismiss students for persistent bad behavior or parents' nonpayment of fees. Written guidelines, including a system of warnings, are necessary and can be patterned on school disciplinary procedures.

*Special Needs.* Because school-sponsored childcare programs operate beyond the normal school day and are not required by law, many do not provide care for severely handicapped children. However, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities, and its provisions may be applied in certain circumstances. School districts should consult with legal counsel regarding liability to provide child care to special needs children.

*Calendars.* School-sponsored child care is intended for before- and after-school hours, not at other times. Some programs do continue on staff inservice days (or partial

days). Clear communication with parents is necessary so that everyone understands the operational calendar, and so that parents can make alternative arrangements when the school-sponsored childcare program is not in operation.

*Summer Programs.* Just as many school districts operate summer sessions, a number are now opting to provide concurrent child care. Because summer sessions tend to be shorter than regular school days, such summer child care may need to operate on a longer daily schedule.

*Competition with Commercial Providers.* School districts may encounter criticism from local commercial providers of child care; however, most commercial providers operate on a more continuous basis than do school-sponsored programs, even if the school district branches into summer child care. Philosophical arguments also are blunted by the self-supporting nature of most school-sponsored childcare programs, because commercial providers' arguments often are critical of using tax dollars for childcare.

*Financial Need.* Most school-sponsored childcare programs need to publicize the availability of the program for low-income families. Some programs have found that higher-income families tend to take advantage of the availability of the program to a greater extent than do families living in poverty. Thus attention needs to be given to financial assistance and other factors that will encourage those families in the least advantageous positions to obtain high-quality care for their latchkey children.

*Written Policies and Procedures.* An essential for the successful school-sponsored childcare program is a consistent, thorough, and followed handbook of policies and procedures. Possible topics for this handbook include: job descriptions, chain of command, and personnel and payroll procedures; policy on employees' children; late pick-up procedures; procedures for applying for financial assistance, sliding-scale guidelines, payment policy, and waiting list procedures; child nutrition procedures; discipline policy and guidelines for dismissal of children from the program; policy on lesson plans and staff training requirements; 504 procedures and guidelines for children with special needs; religious holiday procedures; policies on the use of films, videos, and television; homework policy; field trip forms and procedures; health and safety procedures regarding medication, accidents, lice, communicable diseases, latex gloves and hand washing (universal precautions), injuries to employees; provider list for workers' compensation; security procedures, including policies regarding taking pictures of children; bad weather procedures; sign-in and sign-out forms and procedures; and policies for a summer program.



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# Conclusion

There is strong demand by the public for high-quality before- and after-school childcare programs throughout the United States, especially for preschool and elementary-age children.

Millions of children live in households where the parents or guardians are working outside the home and must depend on relatives and friends, search for affordable childcare, or leave their children unsupervised before and after school. A variety of childcare options exist, of course: churches, child-centered agencies, private schools, city or county recreation departments, and for-profit companies. But schools are uniquely suited to provide extended-day care for children who already are in their schools for most of the day.

Many school districts already have chosen to sponsor childcare programs, and many more are contemplating initiating such programs. School-sponsored childcare programs for school-age children offer a service to parents and their children that can enhance the school experience for the entire community.

Public school-sponsored childcare programs usually are self-funded. They do not require an influx of tax

dollars. They offer competent, consistent care at a convenient, familiar site. The standard of child care mirrors the high standard of care that schools exercise during the instructional day, thus schools are positioned to ensure that child care is fun for children and takes place in a caring and educationally sound environment. Parents can be assured that their children will be engaged in age-appropriate experiences.

Successful school-sponsored childcare programs also involve other entities, such as local colleges and child-oriented agencies, thus fostering communitywide collaboration in the childcare enterprise. Moreover, the successful, self-supporting program can generate funds to enhance the childcare program and other programs of the school district.



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# Resources


Lilly, E.P. *Crisis in the Nation*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992.

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Seligson, Michelle, and Allenson, Michael. *School-Age Child Care: An Action Manual for the 90s and Beyond*. Westport, Conn.: Auburn House, 1993.

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U.S. General Accounting Office. Abstracts of GAO Reports and Testimony. Washington, D.C., 1998. www.gao.gov/AomdexFY97/abstracts/he97075.htm

*Organizations*

Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Drive, Champaign, IL 61820-7469
Website: http://ericeece.org

Educational Research Service
2000 Clarendon Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22201
Phone: (703) 243-2100
Fax: (703) 243-1985
e-mail: mailto:ers@access.digex.net

National Network for Child Care (NNCC)
Website: http://www.exnet.iastate.edu/Pages/nncc/aboutnewsl.html

The NNCC is part of the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service's Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network (CYFERNet). The NNCC produces three newsletters that feature programming ideas, developmental and health information, parent pointers, and business tips.

National School-Age Care Alliance
NSACA NEWS
1137 Washington St.
Boston, MA 02124
Website: www.NSACA.org

NSACA is a membership organization for professionals who provide programs for school-age children.

School-Age Notes (A National Resource Organization on School-Age Care)
P.O. Box 40205
Nashville, TN 37204-0205
Phone: (615) 242-8464
Website: www.schoolagenotes.com

School-Age Notes provides a newsletter and other resources to help professionals provide quality care for school-age children.

National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST)
Center for Research on Women
Wellesley College
106 Central St.
Wellesley, MA 02481
Phone: (781) 283-2547
E-Mail: NIOST@wellesley.edu
Website: www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC

Among the resources available from NIOST is Assessing School-Age Child Care Quality (ASQ), a self-study process that focuses on a team approach to incremental, ongoing change.

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George H. Reavis (1883-1970) entered the education profession after graduating from Warrensburg Missouri State Teachers College in 1906 and the University of Missouri in 1911. He went on to earn an M.A. and a Ph.D. at Columbia University. Dr. Reavis served as Assistant Superintendent of Schools in Maryland and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. In 1929 he was appointed director of instruction for the Ohio State Department of Education. But it was as assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the Cincinnati public schools (1939-48) that he rose to national prominence.

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